

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04

H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /079 W

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P R 241552Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY CAPE TOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5865

INFO AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE CAPE TOWN 0441

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT SF

SUBJ: NEWSPAPER BILL DROPPED FOR THIS SESSION

REF: A) CAPE TOWN 0366, B) CAPE TOWN 413

1. SUMMARY. PRIME MINISTER ANNOUNCED MARCH 23 THAT THE SAG WILL NOT PROCEED WITH CONTENTIOUS NEWSPAPER BILL THIS SESSION, AND WILL ALLOW NEWSPAPER PRESS UNION (NPU) ONE YEAR TO SHOW THAT IT CAN DISCIPLINE ITSELF EFFECTIVELY. SAG PRESS SECRETARIAT WILL BE ESTABLISHED TO COORDINATE WITH PRESS. END SUMMARY.

2. FOLLOWING TWO DAYS OF LENGTHY TALKS WITH NEWSPAPER PRESS UNION LEADERS, PRIME MINISTER VORSTER TOLD PARLIAMENT ON EVENING OF MARCH 23 THAT "IN RESPONSE TO CALLS FROM AND ON BEHALF OF THE NPU, THE GOVERNMENT HAS DECIDED TO GIVE THE NPU ONE YEAR'S CHANCE TO DISCIPLINE ITSELF MORE EFFECTIVELY THROUGH ITS OWN PRESS CODE
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AND COUNCIL...UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES WE WILL NOT GO FORWARD WITH THE BILL NOW BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY."
SECOND READING DEBATE ON BILL WAS TO HAVE GEGUN MARCH 24.

3. PM ALSO ANNOUNCED ESTABLISHMENT BY SAG, AT SUGGESTION OF NPU, OF A PRESS SECRETARIAT ATTACHED TO PM'S OFFICE
"TO COORDINATE WITH THE PRESS AND TO DEAL WITH PRESS

MATTERS AND COMPLAINTS." THE NEW SECRETARY OF THIS BODY, PROBABLY A SENIOR CIVIL SERVANT, WILL BE NAMED IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE, PERHAPS LATER THIS WEEK. AT A PRESS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING HIS STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT, VORSTER SPOKE OF HIS HOPE THAT PRESS DISCIPLINE WILL RESULT IN "NEW ERA" OF PRESS-SAG RELATIONS.

4. STATEMENTS WELCOMING DECISION WERE ISSUED BY NPU AND BY ALL THREE PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION PARTIES. FULL DETAILS OF NEW NPU PRESS CODE AND COUNCIL, WHICH WILL INVOLVE AMENDMENT AND TOUGHENING OF PRESENT CODE, WILL BE PUBLISHED SOON.

5. COMMENT. IN VIEW OF THE UNCERTAINTY OF HOW NEW SELF-DISCIPLINE AGREED TO BY THE NPU WILL WORK AND THE THREAT THAT THE BILL MAY BE TAKEN UP AGAIN NEXT YEAR, A GOOD DEAL OF APPREHENSION REMAINS. BEFORE ATTEMPTING AN ANALYSIS OF WHERE THE EVENTS OF THE PAST TWO WEEKS LEAVE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IN SOUTH AFRICA, WE WANT TO CONSULT KEY EDITORS AND PUBLISHERS. WHEN WE HAVE COMPLETED OUR SOUNDINGS WE WILL SUBMIT AN INTERPRETIVE REPORT.BOWDLER

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